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ABSTRACT

In September 1993 the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released a handbook to assist school- and community-based practitioners in designing and conducting evaluations of drug- and violence-prevention programs funded under the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (DFSCA). A study was undertaken to assess the level of customer satisfaction with the handbook, and to explore the broader context in which local evaluations of alcohol-and-other-drug use and violence-prevention programs occur. Data were obtained through telephone interviews with DFSCA officials from a nationally representative sample of 550 school districts. The survey elicited 506 responses, a 95 percent response rate. The weighted data represent the nearly 14,000 local educational agencies (LEAs) throughout the United States. In sum, most local program coordinators who were responsible for evaluation of DFSCA programs acknowledged the importance of evaluation to effective operations. However, when faced with limited time and funds, many coordinators reported that they would rather allocate their resources to student services than to formal program evaluation. In general, program coordinators perceived guidance and direction from state education agencies, other technical-assistance providers, and written materials to be helpful. However, state and federal expectations for local evaluation need to be more clearly and consistently defined. It is recommended that ED work to establish uniform data-collection requirements for local education agencies that are clearly articulated, easy to understand, and implemented through a targeted technical-assistance initiative. Eight tables are included. The appendix contains tabulated survey responses. (LMI)

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ED 411 608

LOCAL EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS FUNDED UNDER THE DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES ACT

Final Report

U.S. Department of Education
Planning and Evaluation Service

1997

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LOCAL EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS FUNDED UNDER THE DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES ACT

Final Report

1997

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U.S. Department of Education
Planning and Evaluation Service

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Executive Summary

In September 1993 the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released a handbook to assist school- and community-based practitioners in designing and conducting evaluations of drug and violence prevention programs funded under the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (DFSCA). The handbook, entitled *Understanding Evaluation: The Way to Better Prevention Programs*, is designed to be an aid in improving the quality of local evaluations and thereby enhance state and local capacity to operate effective programs. ED contracted with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) in October 1994 to assess the level of customer satisfaction with the handbook, and to explore the broader context in which local evaluations of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and violence prevention programs occur. The specific purposes of RTI's task order were to:

- Identify the types of data collection activities that local educational agencies (LEAs) typically conduct;
- Describe the sources and types of technical assistance LEAs need and obtain to help them conduct high-quality evaluations;
- Determine the level of LEA familiarity and satisfaction with the evaluation handbook and other resources; and
- Obtain the perceptions of program staff at the local level regarding impediments to more successful evaluations, and recommended improvements.

We obtained the information needed to address study purposes through telephone interviews with DFSCA officials from a nationally representative sample of 550 school districts, and achieved a 95 percent response rate to the survey, with a total of 506 completed interviews. We weighted the data to represent the nearly 14,000 LEAs nationwide. We briefly summarize the findings of this investigation below.

Local Data Collection Activity

- The frequency with which LEAs conduct various forms of data collection declines as the complexity of the evaluation design increases: 93 percent of LEAs described program activities and assessed the quality of implementation, while just 10 percent of LEAs implemented an experimental design to compare outcome measures for a treatment and a control group.

- Eighty-six percent of LEAs conducted surveys of student AOD use during the last two years, 48 percent in response to state mandates.

- Other types of data frequently collected by LEAs are those needed to describe program operations and assess the scope of populations at risk of AOD use or violent behavior.

Local Uses of and Needs for Technical Assistance

- State educational agencies are the most frequent providers of technical assistance to LEAs on evaluation issues, with half of all districts reporting receipt of assistance from their state educational agency (SEA); the five DFSCA Regional Centers[1] provided technical assistance on evaluation issues to approximately one-fourth of all LEAs.

- The most frequent type of assistance provided by all sources of technical assistance consisted of workshops or seminars on program issues in general that did not focus on any one dimension of program evaluation; SEAs were more likely to provide assistance in the preparation of grant applications, the Regional Centers in the identification of curricular and other materials, independent professionals and universities in the actual conduct of evaluations, and other state and local agencies in issues related to the DARE program.

- Evaluation planning, obtaining or developing data collection instruments, and data analysis are the aspects of program evaluation in which most LEAs have the greatest need for assistance.

LEA Familiarity and Satisfaction With the Evaluation Handbook

- One-third (33 percent) of all local DFSCA program coordinators in the nation are familiar with the evaluation handbook, and 21 percent have actually read the document.

- Features of the handbook most often identified by local coordinators as especially useful include (1) a good overview of evaluation, (2) ease of understanding, and (3) its practical orientation.

- Of those coordinators who read the handbook, 21 percent found it to be "very useful" in evaluating their DFSCA program and another 76 percent found it to be "somewhat useful." Information from the handbook has been helpful across all areas of program evaluation, especially in evaluation planning and design.

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[1]The 1994 reauthorization consolidated the DFSCA Regional Centers with other categorical technical assistance centers into a new program of Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers. The new Comprehensive Centers became operational on April 1, 1996.

Impediments to More Successful Evaluation and Recommendations for Improvement

- When asked directly about their views on the importance of evaluation, three-fourths of local coordinators agree that formal evaluation is essential to effective program operations; however, when asked the same question in the context of limited resources, the relative priority of evaluation is diminished in the views of many local coordinators.

- Although a majority of program coordinators believe it is reasonable to expect local staff to have the expertise needed to conduct high-quality evaluations of their DFSCA programs, 47 percent cited a lack of expertise in evaluation as a significant impediment to the more successful evaluations.

- Local program coordinators identified lack of time, lack of money, lack of expertise in evaluation, and unclear expectations from state and federal governments as the greatest impediments to more successful local evaluation.

- In response to an open-ended question, local coordinators recommended improvements to local evaluations. The most frequent recommendations offered by local coordinators who identified specific improvements include (1) more training for district staff (25 percent), (2) better guidance from state and federal governments on expectations for DFSCA program evaluation (21 percent), (3) more funding (18 percent), (4) more technical assistance (15 percent), and (5) establishment of uniform data collection requirements for LEAs (14 percent).

In sum, most local program coordinators who are responsible for evaluation of DFSCA programs acknowledge the importance of evaluation to effective operations. For example, nearly all coordinators reported that evaluation data were useful in identifying student needs, directing changes in program content and delivery, justifying continued funding, and fulfilling state and local requirements.[2] Particularly when faced with limited time and funds, however, many coordinators reported that they would rather allocate their resources to student services than to formal program evaluation.

In general, the guidance and direction provided by SEAs, other technical assistance providers, and written materials such as the evaluation handbook are perceived to be helpful, but

[2]Other recent studies have found that only about half of selected districts reported conducting formal evaluations of their prevention programs, and even fewer reported use of evaluation findings for program improvement purposes (see Silvia, E.S., and Thorne, J.M. *School-Based Drug Prevention Programs: A Longitudinal Study in Selected School Districts*. Prepared under contract to the U.S. Department of Education. Research Triangle Park, NC: Research Triangle Institute, 1997).

not as helpful as they might be if state and federal expectations for local evaluation were made clearer and remained consistent from year to year. The problems of limited resources and confusion over expectations would be ameliorated by the establishment of uniform data collection requirements for LEAs that were clearly articulated, easy to understand, and implemented through a targeted technical assistance initiative. ED's ongoing work in the development of program performance indicators and a model data collection system for obtaining the data needed to implement the indicators would appear to be a major step toward creating the conditions under which the quality of local Safe and Drug-Free School program evaluations will improve.

LOCAL EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS FUNDED UNDER THE DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES ACT

Under the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act or DFSCA (which was reauthorized in 1994 as the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, or SDFSCA), the U.S. Department of Education (ED) annually distributes funding to state education agencies (SEAs) to support the establishment and operation of drug prevention programs.[1] SEAs, in turn, award grants to local educational agencies (LEAs), nearly all of which now operate prevention programs. While the law allows considerable flexibility in the types of activities that may be supported, the most common activities carried out under the DFSCA included student assistance programs, student instruction and training, student support groups and counseling, peer leadership activities, parent education, and teacher and staff training.

In September 1993, ED released a handbook to assist school- and community-based practitioners in designing and conducting evaluations of prevention programs funded under the DFSCA. ED distributed the handbook, entitled *Understanding Evaluation: The Way to Better Prevention Programs* (Lana Muraskin, 1993), to every school district in the country in an effort to impress upon local practitioners the importance of conducting evaluations of their prevention programs.[2] The handbook is designed to be an aid in improving the quality of local evaluations and thereby enhance state and local capacity to operate effective programs.

ED contracted with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) in October 1994 to assess the level of customer satisfaction with the handbook. Through structured telephone interviews with local DFSCA program staff, RTI investigated the extent to which local DFSCA program staff are using the handbook, and with what effects. The interview also gathered information on the context in which local evaluations of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use prevention programs

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[1]SDFSCA statutory changes, including the addition of violence prevention as an allowable program activity, were authorized beginning in fiscal year 1995.

[2]Although the handbook is intended as an aid to local DFSCA program evaluation, a disclaimer on the inside cover of the handbook notes that the views expressed "do not necessarily reflect the policy" of the Department. Thus, guidance provided in the handbook may not be cited as a federal mandate or prescription for local program evaluation.

occur, including local uses of, and needs for, technical assistance in evaluation. The specific purposes of RTI's task order were to:

- Identify the types of data collection activities that LEAs typically conduct;
- Describe the sources and types of technical assistance LEAs need and obtain to help them conduct successful evaluation;
- Determine the level of LEA familiarity and satisfaction with the evaluation handbook and other resources; and
- Obtain the perceptions of program staff at the local level regarding impediments to more successful evaluations, and recommendations for state and federal officials for program improvement.

We obtained the information needed to address study purposes through telephone interviews with DFSCA officials from a nationally representative sample of 550 school districts. We achieved a 95 percent response rate to the survey, with a total of 506 completed interviews.[3] The intended respondent to the interview was the LEA's DFSCA program coordinator, but while all respondents were responsible for administration of the DFSCA program in their LEA, most also functioned in other capacities, from district superintendent to school psychologist, since DFSCA program coordination at the local level is a full-time job in only the largest of school districts. A copy of the survey instrument, which includes tabulations of responses to each survey item, is appended to this report. In the remainder of this report we present the study's findings, beginning with a summary of local data collection activities.

Local DFSCA Program Data Collection Activities

The DFSCA required each SEA to submit a biennial report of its performance that includes an evaluation of the effectiveness of state and local programs. The law also required each LEA to submit an annual progress report to the SEA that includes significant accomplishments during the preceding year, the extent to which objectives are being achieved, methods used by the LEA to evaluate program effectiveness, and evaluation results. To date ED

[3]We weighted the data from these 506 completed interviews to represent the 13,762 LEAs in the nation.

has completed three biennial surveys of state performance, covering the periods 1987-89, 1989-91, and 1991-93.[4]

Broadly speaking, data from these surveys consistently indicate that SEAs, and LEAs, about whose evaluation activities SEAs report, are much more likely to conduct process evaluations than they are to implement formal outcome evaluations; and findings from this study confirm SEA reports of local practice. We asked respondents to identify the types of evaluation activities they had completed over the last two years (school years 1993-94 and 1994-95), and to indicate for each whether the district conducted the activity in response to a state mandate, or to fulfill local needs only. **Table 1** summarizes these data.

Table 1: Estimated Percentage of LEAs Conducting Specific Evaluation Activities[5]

Evaluation Activity	Total	State Mandated	Local Use Only
Description of program activities (n=12,749)	93%	76%	17%
Assessment of the quality of program implementation (n=13,685)	93%	66%	27%
Comparison of pre and post assessments on the group receiving services (n=13,594)	65%	31%	34%
Comparison of outcome measures for local program participants with national or state averages (n=13,680)	54%	27%	27%
Longitudinal data collection of outcome measures (n=13,676)	53%	31%	22%
Cross sectional data collection of outcome measures (n=13,616)	50%	27%	23%
Comparison of outcome measures for a treatment group and a control group (n=13,688)	10%	4%	6%

As shown, the frequency with which LEAs conduct various forms of data collection declines as the complexity of the evaluation design increases. While over 90 percent of LEAs

[4]A fourth such state survey, covering the period 1993-95, is in process. Under SDFSCA, states are required to report triennially.

[5]Numbers and percentages of districts in all tables are estimated, based on weighted data, reflecting the universe of districts in the nation.

assessed the quality of program implementation and obtained descriptive statistics on program activities, just 10 percent of all LEAs evaluated their programs using an experimental design. At least half of all LEAs conducted evaluation activities that lie somewhere between simple program description and experimental designs with respect to technical complexity.

The specific information needed by an LEA to gauge the success of its AOD use program will vary according to the program's particular purposes and activities; however, the principal measure of success at local, state, and federal levels is the extent to which AOD use has declined over time. We know from the most recent biennial state survey that all states have conducted surveys of student use of alcohol and other drugs at some point since program inception, and that all LEAs in at least 15 states conducted prevalence surveys in 1991-93. This study of local evaluation practice found that over the last two years 86 percent of LEAs conducted surveys of student use of alcohol and other drugs, 48 percent in response to a state mandate and 38 percent for local use.

Other types of data frequently collected by LEAs are those needed to describe program operations and to assess the scope of the populations at risk of AOD use. In the last two years at least 80 percent of LEAs in the nation obtained measures of truancy, dropping out of school, juvenile arrests, referral for AOD treatment, disciplinary actions resulting from AOD use, suspension or expulsion from school, and participation in AOD prevention activities. In most instances, SEAs require that LEAs collect these data, although the information is also clearly critical to local program planning and operations. Information on youth suicides or suicide attempts, and on source of referral, although somewhat less likely to be required by the state, are still collected by a majority of LEAs; measures of the extent of illegal gang activity are obtained by just 41 percent of school districts nationwide.

As suggested above, nearly all LEAs (97 percent) relied on these descriptive data to identify student needs for AOD use and violence prevention interventions. Most school districts also used these data to identify necessary changes in program content and delivery (90 percent), and to justify continued funding (84 percent). Overall, 93 percent of LEAs used evaluation data

to fulfill state requirements and 82 percent to respond to local requirements. That such a high percentage of districts reported using these data to fulfill local needs, as well as to respond to state mandates, suggests that in most localities evaluation activity has an immediate and directly relevant purpose.

Local Views on the Role of Evaluation and Needs for and Use of Technical Assistance

To assess the extent to which local DFSCA coordinators do, in fact, perceive evaluation as useful for their own immediate purposes, and thus have a vested interest in the quality of evaluation that extends beyond compliance with state and federal regulations, we asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with several statements concerning the importance of evaluation. Overall, three-quarters (74 percent) of DFSCA coordinators agreed that "formal evaluation is an essential component of a successful drug and alcohol prevention program." Moreover, when asked to respond to the statement "evaluation is necessary primarily to document what we are doing for the state or federal government, rather than for meeting local needs," only 26 percent agreed, while 64 percent disagreed and 10 percent were neutral.

Not only do a majority of program officials apparently believe evaluation to be critical to successful AOD and violence prevention programs, but most also believe that they should be responsible for conducting the evaluations. Anecdotal evidence from prior studies of the DFSCA program has suggested that many local officials feel ill-equipped to implement formal evaluation designs and that many would prefer to have an independent agency or professional evaluate their programs. However, when asked about these issues directly, a majority of DFSCA coordinators believe it is reasonable for the state and federal government to expect them to have the expertise needed to conduct quality evaluations (59 percent) and that program staff, rather than an independent entity, should conduct the evaluation (72 percent).

At the same time, local officials acknowledge their need for assistance in virtually all aspects of program evaluation. Over half of all program coordinators indicated a need in their district for technical assistance in the areas of evaluation planning (61 percent), obtaining or

developing data collection instruments (60 percent), data analysis (59 percent), and using evaluation findings for program improvement (54 percent). A significant percentage of program officials also perceive a need for assistance with reporting of evaluation findings (43 percent) and data collection (40 percent). Asked to identify the area in which they most needed assistance, nearly one-third indicated "obtaining or developing data collection instruments," 24 percent identified "evaluation planning," and 22 percent reported "using evaluation results to improve the program."

To identify the extent to which LEAs avail themselves of existing technical assistance resources, we asked respondents to indicate if they had received any type of assistance in evaluation issues during the past year (school year 1994-95) from a variety of sources. **Table 2** indicates the percentage of all LEAs that obtained training or technical assistance from specific sources during the past year, and the percentage who identified each source as the most useful.

Table 2: Estimated Percentage of LEAs Obtaining Training and Technical Assistance from Specific Sources During the Past Year

Source of Assistance	Percentage of LEAs Reporting Receipt of Technical Assistance	Percentage of LEAs Identifying Each Source as the Most Useful Assistance
State educational agencies (n=13,707)	50%	39%
DFSCA Regional Centers (n=13,648)	26%	12%
Independent professional (n=13,485)	24%	18%
Other state agency (n=13,666)	20%	9%
College or university (n=13,719)	14%	4%
Other source[6] (n=11,369)	24%	17%

As would be expected, SEAs were the most frequent source of technical assistance on evaluation issues at the local level, with half of all respondents reporting receipt of technical

[6]Other sources included law enforcement agencies, local social service agencies, and private treatment facilities.

assistance from their SEA during the last school year. The last biennial survey of SEAs revealed that in school year 1991-92 SEAs allocated approximately $5.6 million of their 10 percent set-aside funds (28 percent of the total $19.8 million set aside) to provide training and technical assistance to school and community-based AOD program staff. How much of this assistance targeted evaluation issues specifically is not known; however, 91 percent of SEAs provided technical assistance to LEAs on evaluation issues.[7]

The second most frequent source of technical assistance in evaluation issues was the five DFSCA Regional Centers, from whom approximately one-fourth of all LEAS received training or technical assistance.[8] The DFSCA Regional Centers assisted schools and communities to operate effective AOD prevention programs through training, technical assistance, dissemination, and in responding to SEA and LEA requests. Independent professionals or consultants were used by nearly as many LEAs to obtain technical assistance in evaluation issues, as were "other" sources, the bulk of which are local law enforcement and other community-based agencies. One-fifth of all LEAs obtained assistance from a state agency other than the SEA, and 14 percent from a college or university.

To some extent the most appropriate provider of technical assistance will depend on the type of help an LEA needs, although the most frequent type of assistance provided by all sources, as reported by local program coordinators, consisted of workshops or seminars on program issues in general that did not necessarily focus on any one dimension of program evaluation. For SEAs the second most frequent type of assistance provided to LEAs was help in the preparation of grant applications, while the second most frequent type of assistance provided by Regional Centers was in helping LEAs to identify appropriate curricular and other materials. Independent professionals and colleges or universities were more likely to assist in the actual conduct of

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[7]Characteristics of DFSCA State and Local Programs, 1991-93.

[8]The 1994 reauthorization consolidated the DFSCA Regional Centers with other categorical technical assistance centers into a new program of Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers. The new Comprehensive Centers became operational on April 1, 1996.

program evaluation than were other sources, while other state and local agencies were more likely to provide assistance related to the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program.

LEAs' Use of The Evaluation Handbook and Other Resources

The evaluation handbook ED disseminated to all LEAs in 1993 is designed as a resource document for local staff to consult on many of the same issues addressed by SEAs, the Regional Centers, and other technical assistance providers in their efforts to assist LEAs to conduct more rigorous evaluations. The handbook stresses the importance of evaluation to effective AOD prevention programs, introduces the reader to a few basic principles of successful evaluation, and describes the steps involved in designing and conducting program evaluations using case examples drawn from a fictitious school district. The handbook's underlying premise is that "many evaluations that use simple designs can be conducted without formal training in evaluation," and it stresses the integration of evaluation into the overall fabric of a program and the involvement of program personnel (as opposed to independent experts) in decision making regarding the evaluation's goals, conduct of the evaluation, and interpretation of evaluation results.

One-third (33 percent) of all local DFSCA coordinators in the nation were familiar with the handbook, and 21 percent have actually read the document.[9] We asked respondents who have read the handbook to identify those features of the document that they particularly liked, and **Table 3** summarizes the responses of those who were able to identify specific features.[10] Of the approximately 3,000 coordinators who read the handbook, 64 percent (or 13 percent of all LEAs) reported that they have applied information from the handbook in their work.

Table 4 summarizes the ways in which local program coordinators reported using information from the handbook. As these data show, information from the handbook has been

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[9]Given the time lag between ED's dissemination of the document and the initiation of our interviews approximately two years later, it is reasonable to assume that these percentages somewhat underestimate actual awareness of the document, as a result of staff turnover and other intervening factors.

[10]Twenty-seven percent of the respondents who had read the handbook were unable to remember any particular feature.

helpful across all areas of evaluation, especially in the planning and evaluation design phases. Overall, of those who used information from the handbook, 21 percent reported that it was "very

Table 3: Estimated Percentage of Local Coordinators Reporting Specific Features of the Handbook as Especially Useful

Handbook Features	Of Coordinators Who Read the Handbook, Percentage Who Cited Each Factor (n=2,934)
Provides a good overview of evaluation	29%
Easy to understand	26%
Practical orientation	25%
Use of case examples	13%
Suitability as a reference document	9%

Table 4: Estimated Percentage of Local Coordinators Who Read the Handbook Who Applied the Information in Various Aspects of Local SDFSCA Program Evaluation

Uses	Of Coordinators Who Read the Handbook, Percentage Who Applied the Information (n= 2,934)
Evaluation planning or design	88%
Identifying evaluation questions or issues	79%
Interpreting data collected	62%
Reporting of evaluation findings	59%
Implementation of the evaluation design	58%
Staff training	47%
Developing data collection instruments	45%

useful" in evaluating their DFSCA programs, and another three-fourths of these respondents (76 percent) reported the handbook as being "somewhat useful" in evaluation efforts. Only two percent of those who read the document believed the handbook to be "not useful."

An appendix to the handbook identifies other guides to AOD use prevention program evaluation potentially useful to local staff in the evaluation of their DFSCA programs, and we

asked respondents to indicate their familiarity with each. **Table 5** identifies the percentage of local program coordinators familiar with each document. Useful features of these resources, as identified by respondents, include many of the same characteristics cited about the ED handbook, such as ease of understanding, use of examples, and suitability as a reference document.

Table 5: Estimated Percentage of Local Coordinators Familiar With Other Evaluation Guides

Resource	Percentage of Coordinators (n=13,748)
Prevention Plus III, Assessing Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Programs at the School and Community Level (Linney and Wandersman)	20%
Handbook for Evaluating Drug and Alcohol Prevention Programs (STEPP) (University of Maryland, 1990)	16%
Evaluation of Prevention Programs: A Basic Guide for Practitioners (Moberg, 1986)	12%
CSAP Technical report #8: Measurements and Prevention	7%
Program Evaluation Handbook: Drug Abuse Education (IOX Associates)	7%

Impediments to Local Evaluation and Recommendations for Improvement

We asked respondents to identify significant impediments to successful evaluation of their districts' DFSCA program, and not surprisingly, the two most frequently cited were a lack of time (81 percent) and a lack of money (69 percent). As indicated in **Table 6**, a lack of expertise needed to conduct successful evaluations and unclear expectations from state and federal governments were also identified as significant impediments by nearly half of all respondents, followed by confidentiality issues, and lack of support from district officials. Asked to identify the greatest single impediment, 37 percent cited a lack of time, another third (34 percent) reported a lack of money, and 10 percent unclear expectations from the federal government.

That "a lack of time" is identified as the greatest impediment to successful evaluation by more respondents that any other single factor reflects the fact that most local program

Table 6: Estimated Percentage of Coordinators Citing Specific Impediments to More Successful Local DFSCA Program Evaluation

Impediment	Percentage of Local Coordinators
Lack of time (n=13,762)	81%
Lack of money (n=13,755)	69%
Lack of expertise in evaluation (n=13,740)	47%
Unclear expectations from state/federal government (n=13,725)	45%
Lack of support from district officials/low priority (n=13,730)	24%
Confidentiality issues (n=13,762)	23%

coordinators allocate only a portion of their time to DFSCA-related activities in general, let alone DFSCA program evaluation. Previous reports of the DFSCA program[11] have noted that responsibility for program administration and operation at the local level is assumed by a wide range of local officials, from district superintendent to school nurse, and the respondents to our telephone interview also varied considerably with respect to job title, as indicated in **Table 7**.

Table 7: Estimated Percentage of Respondents With Specific Job Titles

Job Title	Percentage of Respondents (n=13,762)
Prevention program coordinator	24%
District superintendent or assistant superintendent	19%
School counselor, psychologist, or social worker	16%
School principal or assistant principal	13%
Other local administrator	10%
Instructor	7%
Director of student services	5%
Student assistance program coordinator	3%
Other	3%

[11]LEA Cross-Site Analysis.

As may be discerned from the variety of job titles listed, program administration and evaluation constitute a small percentage of overall responsibilities for many local program coordinators. Moreover, these individuals are essentially concerned with service delivery and one would not expect service delivery staff to place as high a priority on evaluation as would professional researchers or evaluation specialists, particularly given limited resources.

When asked directly if formal evaluation is essential to a successful program, nearly three-fourths of respondents agreed that it is, as we have noted; however, when the same issue is raised within the context of limited resources and time, the relative priority of formal evaluation declines in the views of a sizeable percentage of local coordinators. For example, a majority of respondents (53 percent) agreed with the statement "our district would rather allocate all of its DFSCA resources to program development and student services than allocate up to five percent to evaluation." While it is understandable that local administrators place a high priority on service delivery, these data suggest that many local coordinators may not fully appreciate the value of formal evaluation to effective program operations. Further evidence of this notion is reflected by the 44 percent of respondents who agreed with the statement, "my district is able to meet its evaluation needs through ongoing observation of program operations and activities; formal evaluation is not necessary."[12]

Finally, even though most respondents believe it is reasonable to expect DFSCA program staff to have the expertise needed for planning and conducting formal evaluation, as we noted earlier, many clearly do not believe that they possess the requisite skills. In fact, 47 percent of respondents cited a lack of expertise in evaluation as an impediment to successful evaluation, and the percentages of respondents reporting a need for technical assistance in six discrete areas of evaluation (e.g., planning, collecting data, analysis, etc.) ranged from 40 to 61 percent.

As Table 6 indicates, unclear state and federal expectations is another frequently cited impediment to successful local evaluation. This perception stems in large measure from the evolutionary legislative and regulatory history of the program. Since its enactment in 1986, the

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[12]Forty-five percent disagreed and 11 percent were neutral.

DFSCA has been amended no fewer than five times, resulting in significant changes to the scope of the program, including the addition of violence prevention as a key element. Not only has the legislation changed with some regularity from reporting period to reporting period, but the information requested by the federal government in its biennial surveys has changed with each survey administration. An unfortunate result of these, albeit necessary, modifications is that while LEAs and SEAs are aware of overall statutory requirements, they do not know until it is too late what specific types of evaluative information and data will be requested.

Local frustration over changing state and federal expectations for program evaluation is reflected in respondents' comments on how local evaluation could be improved, as are the other major impediments cited by program coordinators. **Table 8** lists the most frequent recommendations offered by local DFSCA officials for improvement of local program evaluation. Each of these recommendations addresses to some extent one or more of the four greatest impediments to successful evaluation, as identified by local staff.

Table 8: Estimated Percentage of Local DFSCA Coordinators With Recommendations for State or Federal Government Actions Needed to Improve Local Evaluation

Recommendation	Of Coordinators With Any Recommendations, Percentage Reporting Each Recommendation (n=11,835)
Provide more training to district staff	25%
Provide more or better guidance on expectations	21%
Provide more funding	18%
Provide more technical assistance or information generally	15%
Establish uniform data collection requirements	14%
Set aside a percentage of local funds for evaluation	13%
Provide a survey instrument for local use	9%
Streamline or reduce program/evaluation requirements	8%
Provide more flexibility in program/evaluation requirements	5%

Perhaps the most critical of these recommendations, or the one action that would most positively influence the quality of local evaluations, is a clarification of federal expectations for program evaluation. Structuring the evaluation process such that whatever local effort is expended on evaluation is appropriately targeted to meet state and federal, as well as local, needs offers the best potential for improvement of local evaluations. Training and technical assistance that LEAs need to fully implement evaluation requirements could then also be focused to fit specific objectives and procedures. Moreover, the quality of local evaluation will improve to the extent federal expectations remain stable from one year to the next.

ED's current effort to establish and implement national performance indicators for the program will go a long way toward clarifying federal expectations for local, as well as state-level, program performance and for the types of information required to evaluate that performance. While performance indicators are unlikely to address all local information needs, once model data collection standards are established and local program administrators know the criteria by which the success of their program will be measured, evaluation activity may be structured to collect these data in a routine and systematic fashion. Comparability of data across states and localities would also be enhanced if LEAs were encouraged to use a specific survey instrument for measuring the prevalence of AOD use. Model data collection standards and a recommended AOD use survey instrument would provide a framework upon which LEAs could include additional data collection tailored to local needs for performance information.

Appendix

LOCAL USES OF DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES ACT PROGRAM EVALUATION MATERIALS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW WITH LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY OFFICIALS

Tabulated Responses

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW WITH LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY OFFICIALS

What is your job title? (n=13,762)

a.	Prevention program coordination	24%
b.	District superintendent or assistant superintendent	19%
c.	School counselor, psychologist, or social worker	16%
d.	School principal or assistant principal	13%
e.	Other local administrator	10%
f.	Instructor	7%
g.	Director of student services	5%
h.	Student assistant program coordinator	3%
i.	Other	3%

1a. Does your district have a research and evaluation division? (n=13,273)

01	Yes	6%
02	No	93%
03	Do not know	1%

1b. **(SKIP THIS QUESTION IF THE RESPONDENT'S JOB TITLE IS EVALUATION SPECIALIST.)** Does your district employ or contract with an evaluation specialist? (n=13,273)

01	Yes	13%
02	No	87%

2. Now I'm going to ask you about some evaluation methods your district may have used to gather information about your prevention program during the last two years. For each method I mention, please indicate whether the evaluation activity has (1) been conducted to fulfill state requirements, (2) been conducted for local purposes only, or (3) not been used at all in the last two years. **READ a-g AND CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH LINE. READ SECTIONS IN PARENTHESES UNDER b, c, AND g ONLY IF RESPONDENT SEEMS UNCLEAR ABOUT WHAT THE ITEM MEANS. NOTE: If information is used for both state and local purposes, circle "01."**

	State Mandated	Local Use Only	Not Collected	Don't Know
a. Description of program activities (n=12,749)	76%	17%	3%	4%
b. Assessing how well the program is implemented (includes impressions of students or staff regarding the quality of programs or services; for example, evaluation of a training program, questionnaires collected from participants at the close of a special event regarding their reactions) (n=13,685)	66%	27%	6%	1%
c. Longitudinal data collection of outcome measures (includes repeated measures on the same group of students; for example, administering student drug use surveys to the same group of students as they progress through various grades) (n=13,676)	31%	22%	46%	1%
d. Cross sectional data collection of outcome measures (n=13,616)	27%	23%	48%	2%
e. Comparison of pre and post assessments of students (n=13,594)	31%	24%	34%	1%
f. Comparison of outcome measures for local students with national or state averages (n=13,680)	27%	27%	44%	2%
g. Comparison of outcome measures for a treatment group (students receiving the program being evaluated) and a control/comparison group (students who do not receive the program being evaluated) (n=13,688)	4%	6%	88%	2%

3. Now I'd like to ask you about the types of data your district may have collected during the last two years: Again, for each type of data please indicate whether it has (1) been collected in response to state requirements, (2) been collected for local purposes only, or (3) not been collected during the last two years. **(READ a-k AND CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH LINE. NOTE: If information is used for both state and local purposes, circle "01.")**

	State Mandated	Local Use Only	Not Collected	Don't Know
a. Local surveys of student use of alcohol and other (n=13,689)	48%	38%	13%	1%
b. Number of school disciplinary actions regarding alcohol and other drugs (n=13,659)	51%	35%	14%	—
c. Number of students referred for alcohol and other drug treatment (n=13,666)	41%	40%	19%	1%
d. Source of referral (n=13,561)	22%	43%	34%	1%
e. Number of juvenile arrests and convictions for violent crime or drugs (n=13,742)	33%	26%	40%	1%
f. Extent of illegal gang activity (n=13,728)	20%	21%	59%	1%
g. Number of dropouts (n=13,602)	68%	18%	13%	1%
h. Rates of expulsions or suspensions from school (n=13,676)	61%	28%	10%	1%
i. Truancy/school absenteeism (n=13,572)	58%	33%	8%	—
j. Suicides and attempted suicides (n=13,635)	21%	41%	37%	1%
k. Number of students participating in activities for prevention and treatment of alcohol and other drug use (n=13,612)	53%	31%	16%	1%

4. Has your district used evaluation data in any of the following ways? **(READ a-e AND CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH LINE.)** (n=13,681)

	Yes	No
a. To justify continued funding	84%	16%
b. To identify needs of students	97%	3%
c. To direct changes in program content and delivery	90%	10%
d. To fulfill state requirements	93%	7%
e. To fulfill local requirements	82%	18%
f. Other	2%	98%

5. Now I would like to ask about your perceptions of the role of evaluation, and about obstacles to successful evaluation. I will read a series of sentences and ask you to indicate whether you agree, disagree (or are neutral or undecided). **(READ EACH SENTENCE AND CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH LINE)**

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
a. My district is able to meet its evaluation needs through ongoing observation of program operations and activities; formal evaluation is not necessary. (n=13,748)	44%	11%	45%
b. Our district would rather allocate all of its DFSCA resources to program development and student services than allocate up to five percent to evaluation. (n=13,762)	53%	11%	36%
c. Our district prefers to have its DFSCA programs evaluated by an independent entity, rather than by program or district staff. (n=13,775)	14%	14%	72%
d. Evaluation is necessary primarily as a means to document what we are doing for the state or the federal government (that is, for accountability) rather than for meeting local needs. (n=13,665)	26%	10%	64%
e. It is realistic to expect DFSCA program staff to have the expertise needed for planning and conducting formal program evaluation. (n=13,755)	59%	12%	29%
f. Formal evaluation is an essential component of a successful drug and alcohol prevention program. (n=13,762)	74%	10%	15%

6. Does your district need training or technical assistance in any of the following areas of program evaluation for your prevention program? (**READ a - f AND CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH LINE.**) (n=13,606)

	Yes	No
a. Evaluation planning	61%	39%
b. Obtaining or developing data collection instruments	60%	40%
c. Data collection	40%	60%
d. Data analysis	59%	41%
e. Reporting evaluation findings	43%	57%
f. Using evaluation findings for program improvement	54%	46%

7. In which one of these areas that we just discussed are you most in need of training or assistance? **(Read 01-06. CIRCLE ONLY ONE.)** (n=10,203)

01 Evaluation planning	24%
02 Obtaining or developing data collection instruments	31%
03 Data collection	6%
04 Data analysis	12%
05 Reporting evaluation findings	4%
06 Using evaluation findings for program improvement	22%
07 Other area	1%

8. Do any of the following factors represent significant impediments to successful evaluation of your district's DFSCA program? (**READ a-f AND CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH LINE.**) (n=13,762)

	Yes	No
a. Lack of money	69%	31%
b. Lack of time	81%	19%
c. Lack of expertise	47%	53%
d. Confidentiality issues	23%	77%
e. Unclear expectations from state/federal government	45%	54%
f. Lack of support from district officials/low priority	24%	76%

9. Which of the factors that we just discussed do you think is the greatest single impediment? **(Read 01-06. CIRCLE ONLY ONE)** (n=12,751)

01 Lack of money	36%
02 Lack of time	39%
03 Lack of expertise	6%
04 Confidentiality issues	4%
05 Unclear expectations from state/federal government	10%
06 Lack of support from district officials/low priority	6%

10. Please indicate if during the last year your district obtained training or technical assistance in evaluation of its DFSCA programs from any of the following sources, and if so, briefly describe the type(s) of assistance or training provided. **(***READ a-f.*** CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE ON EACH LINE AND RECORD TYPE OF ASSISTANCE RECEIVED FROM EACH SOURCE.)**

	Yes	No
a. College or university (specify type of assistance) (n=13,719) GEN'L WKSP=47%; DO EVAL =18%; DATA COLLECTION=15%	14%	86%
b. State education agency (specify type of assistance) (n=13,707) GEN'L WKSP=66%; HELP WITH GRANTS=15%; DATA COLLECTION=7%	50%	50%
c. Other state agency (specify type of assistance) (n=13,665) GEN'L WKSP=47%; DARE=19%; DATA COLLECTION=8%	20%	80%
d. DFSCA Regional Centers (specify type of assistance) (n=13,648) GEN'L WKSP=43%; CURRICULUM MATERIALS=13%; CONSULT=7%	26%	74%
e. Independent professional (specify type of assistance) (n=13,485) GEN'L WKSP=28%; DO EVAL =10%; STUDENT ASSISTANT=9%	24%	76%
f. Other (specify type of assistance) (n=11,369) GEN'L WKSP=26%; DARE=18%; DO EVAL=8%	24%	76%

11. Which of these sources that we just discussed provided the most useful assistance? **(Read 01-05. CIRCLE ONLY ONE)** (n=10,255)

01	College or university	4%	
02	State education agency	39%	
03	Other state agency	9%	
04	Regional Centers for DFSCA	12%	
05	Independent professional	18%	
06	Other (n=1,738)	17%	
	a. County education office		20%
	b. Local law enforcement or other local agency		14%
	c. None were helpful		21%
	d. Other		45%

12. In Fall 1993 the U.S. Department of Education disseminated a handbook for DFSCA program evaluation to your district, entitled "*Understanding Evaluation: The Way to Better Prevention Programs*." Are you familiar with this handbook? (n=13,693)

01 Yes 33%
02 No 67% **(If respondent says no, probe by describing the appearance and content of the book as follows:**

It has a purple and black cover, and was written by Lana Muraskin. It describes the steps in designing program evaluations and in implementing an evaluation design, including an example using a fictitious school district called Wood County. Does that help?

If respondent is still not aware of the handbook skip to item 21.)

13. Have you read the handbook? (n=4,551)

01	Yes	65%
02	No **(Skip to item 22)**	35%

14. Did you receive training in how to use the evaluation handbook? (n=2,910)

01	Yes	16%
02	No	84%

15. Who provided the training? (n=492)
SEA=50%; REGIONAL CENTERS=26%; UNIV.=11%; OTHER=1%

16. What do you like most about the handbook? (n=2,934)

a.	Easy to understand	17%
b.	Practical orientation	16%
c.	Use of case examples	8%
d.	Provides a good overview	18%
e.	Resource/reference	6%
f.	Nothing specific	9%
g.	Do not remember	27%

17. What do you like least about the handbook? (n=2,934)

a.	Not practical enough	4%
b.	Too long	3%
c.	Examples do not apply to my program	5%
c.	Nothing specific	18%
d.	Do not remember	9%
f.	Other	58%

18. Have you or your colleagues ever used the handbook or applied information from the handbook in your work? (n=2,753)

01	Yes	64%
02	No **(Skip to item 22)**	34%
03	Don't know	2%

19. In which of the following ways have you used the handbook? **(READ a-g AND CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE ON EACH LINE)** (n=1,758)

		Yes	No
a.	In overall evaluation planning or design	88%	12%
b.	To help identify evaluation questions or issues	79%	21%
c.	In developing data collection instruments	45%	55%
d.	To help guide implementation of the evaluation design	58%	42%
e.	As an aid to interpreting data collected	62%	38%
f.	To help guide reporting of evaluation findings	59%	41%
g.	As part of staff training	47%	53%
h.	Other use	60%	40%

20. Overall, how useful has the handbook been to you and district staff in evaluating your DFSCA programs? (n=1,803)

01	Very useful	22%
02	Somewhat useful	76%
03	Not useful	1%
04	Don't know	1%

21. Please briefly explain your response: (n=1,658)

a.	Good reference	15%	g.	Information was applicable	3%
b.	Help in planning	12%	h.	Information not applicable	3%
c.	No specific reason	13%	i.	Confirmed our approach	3%
d.	Need training also	3%	j.	Used with other resources	5%
e.	Too technical	3%	k.	Other	19%
f.	Examples	4%			

22. Are you familiar with any of these other technical assistance products? **(READ a-e AND CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE ON EACH LINE)** (n=13,748)

		Yes	No
a.	*Handbook for Evaluating Drug and Alcohol Prevention Programs (STEPP)* (University of Maryland, 1990)	16%	84%
b.	*Program Evaluation Handbook: Drug Abuse Education*, IOX Associates	7%	93%
c.	*Prevention Plus III, Assessing Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Programs at the School and Community Level* (Linney and Wandersman)	20%	80%
d.	*Evaluation of Prevention Programs: A Basic Guide for Practitioners* (Moberg, 1984)	12%	88%
e.	*CSAP Technical Report #8: Measurements and Prevention*	7%	93%
f.	Other	2%	98%

23. Of the products we just discussed, which one is the most helpful with respect to planning and conducting program evaluations? **(CIRCLE ONLY ONE)** (N=4,986)

01	*Handbook for Evaluating Drug and Alcohol Prevention Programs (STEPP)*	17%
02	*Program Evaluation Handbook: Drug Abuse Education*	10%
03	*Prevention Plus III, Assessing Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Programs at the School and Community Level*	26%
04	*Evaluation of Prevention Programs: A Basic Guide for Practitioners*	11%
05	*CSAP Technical Report #8 - Measurements and Prevention*	5%
06	Other	30%

24. Briefly explain why this resource is helpful. (n=4,986)

a.	Easy to understand	5%
b.	Provides useful tools and instruments	8%
c.	Practical orientation	1%
d.	Use of case examples	8%
e.	Good reference	9%
f.	Applicable to local program	3%
g.	Most readily available resource	3%
h.	Helpful in project design	3%
i.	Provides models, step-by-step guidance	6%
j.	No specific reason	29%
k.	Other	20%
l.	Don't know	18%

25. What can your state education agency or the U.S. Department of Education do to improve local evaluations of DFSCA programs? (n=13,761)

a.	Provide more or better guidance on expectations	18%
b.	Establish uniform data collection requirements	12%
c.	Set aside a percentage of local funds for evaluation	11%
d.	Provide training to district staff	22%
e.	Provide more flexibility in program/evaluation requirements	5%
f.	Streamline-reduce program/evaluation requirements	7%
g.	Strengthen evaluation requirements	3%
h.	Provide more funding	15%
i.	Disseminate effective evaluation models/programs	2%
j.	Provide more guidance on parent and community involvement	3%
k.	Help conduct evaluations/do evaluations for us	3%
l.	Provide more technical assistance or information generally	13%
m.	Provide more guidance on parental consent/confidentiality	1%
n.	Provide a survey instrument for us to use	8%
o.	More time	4%
p.	None/don't know	14%
q.	Other	10%